

Champleve Enamel for Clash with Bacchus

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Contents

Acknowledgement 3

Abstract 4

Champlevè Enamel 4

 Period Information 4

 Our Method - Key Differences 4

Relevance - The Maenads and the Thyrsus 5

References 6



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Abstract

Presented here are several pieces of enamel done in Champlevé style. There are several different enamels done with the theme of alcohol, each representing a different type of drink. There are also a few Thyrsus medallions, representing the followers of Bacchus and the aspects of life they support: hedonism, partying, and good fun. See section entitled “Relevance...” to learn more!

The following is an overview of the process to create the enamel:

1. A design was created in Adobe Illustrator.
2. That design was applied to the copper disk as a resist for etching.
3. Etching.
4. Cleaning and de-oxidizing the metal.
5. The enamel was packed and the piece placed in the kiln.
6. Polishing.

What follows is some discussion on how Champlevé enamel was created in period, and some notes on how the designs relate to Bacchus.

See associated docs for technical information on the drawing, etching, and enameling process.

Champlevé Enamel

Period Information

Champlevé Enamel created in Limoges, France (see book Enamels of Limoges from the Met) began around the 12th century to the 14th century, a break for some time, and then a revival in the 15th century. The

Champlevé enamel is created by engraving cloisens (depressions) in the metal, as opposed to cloisonné enamel, which uses wires to create the shapes. A design is chosen and sketched out onto the metal and the drawing is engraved into it using gravers and other similar tools.

After the grooves are deep enough, opaque glass was ground up, rinsed, and then carefully placed into the grooves. The Europeans seemed to lack the technique to create opaque glasses, and so dug up mosaic tiles from Roman period to grind up and fire.

When the grooves were sufficiently filled with wet enamel, the piece was placed into a kiln where the glass would melt. The excess enamel is ground off using stones and polishing tools, and refired to smooth.

The resultant metal was then polished to a quality luster.

Our Method - Key Differences

This enamel essentially follows a very similar process. However, the major differences are as follows:



- Acid etching is used instead of engraving for the most part. Engraving is incredibly time consuming and etching fulfills the same purpose, so substituting the methods is simply a matter of convenience.
- Etching also involves the use of transfer paper to apply the design to the metal. We use a heat transfer press and circuit board transfer paper.
- Unlike period enamel, modern enamel comes prepared and pre-sifted in a consistent grain size.

As mentioned previously, a lot of the process for enameling is very similar to period Champlevé enamel styles.

Relevance - The Maenads and the Thyrsus

A Thyrsus was a staff made of a giant fennel (for the handle) and topped with a pine cone. It was sometimes wrapped with a ribbon or vines.

The Thyrsus is a symbol of Bacchus' followers: the Maenads and the Satyrs which indicates fertility, hedonism, and general pleasure for life.

The Thyrsus has appeared in the Iliad, writings of Plato, and in an ancient Greek tragedy called The Bacchae.

The Maenads were female followers of Bacchus (called the Bacchae in Roman mythology). Essentially, they get drunk and party. Art depicting Maenads and Thyrsi, along with their respective equipment, have been found all over and are now displayed in many museums.



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